

Father General's Address at Vidyajoti College, Delhi

Father General Arturo Sosa has urged Jesuits serving in higher education to draw on networking as a way of becoming more effective in their ministries. Here is the text of his speech to the Vidyajoti Theology Faculty in Delhi, on February 18, 2017:

This is my first visit to India. In addition, it is the first time I address a Theology Faculty in my capacity as Chancellor. This is a tough challenge for a Latin-American Jesuit whose intellectual background has been the field of Social Sciences. Nevertheless, you and I share the same challenge of reflecting on our faith from our own roots, from our own culture and especially from the perspective of the poor. I am a Jesuit and, naturally, I will speak as a Jesuit addressing a Jesuit Faculty. However, I am very conscious that we are privileged to have diocesan priests and seminarians, and religious women and men of various Congregations as staff and students of Vidyajoti. I want to share with you a short reflection on the commitment of the Society of Jesus to the intellectual apostolate, which embraces also theological reflection, and the relationship between intellectual formation and faith.

1. The intellectual dimension of the Society of Jesus - The Society of Jesus was founded by men of deep faith, who were trained in universities. They adopted a lifestyle of faith that impelled them to think critically and creatively about all aspects of the world, understood as a common home. Throughout its history, the Society of Jesus has emphasised the intellectual training of its members in various fields of human knowledge, not only in the humanities, but also in the social sciences and all other branches of science. This is neither the time nor the place to list the Jesuits who have made substantial contributions to mathematics, physics, astronomy, biology, geography, anthropology and the social sciences. I just want to highlight and bring into relief this important feature of the tradition of the Society. From this characteristic arises also the engagement of the Society of Jesus with Universities in many different ways. There are many Jesuits who immerse themselves in University life as researchers and educators, and there are dozens of universities administered by the Society of Jesus. A fair few of these Jesuit universities have faculties of theology associated with them.

Further, there is the heavy investment that the Society of Jesus makes in the formation of its members. It spares neither time nor its resources in ensuring a good intellectual formation together with an integral formation centered on a spirituality capable of deepening a faith that engages in activities that promote justice and reconciliation between human beings and nature and in dialogue with cultures and religions. We Jesuits seek to collaborate in the development of creative thinking that may propel the new age of Humanity towards social justice, dignity and peace. We wish to do this always in partnership and in collaboration with others. We have no desire to develop a thinking peculiar to ourselves, to be characterized as a "Jesuit thinking." We participate in a collective intellectual creation because we know that we are limited and have wide variations even among ourselves.

The Society promotes intellectual activity in all areas in which it is involved. Certainly in universities and scientific or social research institutes, but in educational, social and pastoral

work. We are convinced of the need of complementarity between action and thought. Acting without thinking becomes so often useless and even dangerous. Thinking detached from the reality of social and pastoral action is also a futile and dangerous exercise. The intellectual dimension promoted by the Society of Jesus seeks to respond to the situations of individuals, communities and human societies. Faced with dramatic situations such as those, for example, of refugees or migrants, or the marginalized, in general, one strives to understand both the situation and the causes that provoke these. Therefore, it is important to think how to ameliorate the immediate condition of the people who are suffering and, at the same time, deal with the root causes of the situation. In the case of migrants, for example, one tries to accompany them on their journey and to nurture their hopes of finding a better life. But, one also tries to think of ways to raise awareness of the causes and promote initiatives for social transformation that put an end to the conditions that cause millions of people to leave, without wishing to, their home and even their country.

The Jesuit is an intellectual engaged in the transformation of human life, beginning with his own life and that of his brethren. This way of understanding the intellectual life keeps us in a permanent tension between, the time, resources and energy required to do research so that our thinking be really creative on the one hand, and, on the other, the time, resources and energy needed to carry out effective action for personal and social transformation. You can imagine the challenge this tension poses in the context of the current situation of the world and in the context of the multicultural international body that we are. The Society of Jesus, today, is present in 123 countries of the world! We come from many different cultures and social situations and are very deeply committed to build an intercultural identity, inspired by the experience of Jesus of Nazareth, incarnate in a small village of a colonized nation, who became the universal man, a light for all Nations.

2. Faith, universities and new age of Humanity - The starting point of my **experience of faith is the conviction of being part of a human history that is open-ended and on the move. I am convinced that creation is not over yet and that we, human beings, are the creators responsible for ensuring that people can find the conditions suitable for a dignified life. One of the essential dimensions of the message of the Second Vatican Council, as we experienced ourselves, is that we are bearers of good news to the world that finds itself at the threshold of one of the biggest transformations in human history. Vatican II had divined what has become a commonplace of thought in the second half of the twentieth century: humanity is living through a change of era, that is, we are subject to something that is being born, an innovation that we feel, even if we cannot express it rationally. We started calling this novelty in comparative terms like post modernity or post capitalism and gradually, as a society of information or of knowledge, without being able to really define it because it still doesn't exist. Our actions are geared towards bringing it to birth!**

The human dimension of faith positively supports the challenge to participate creatively in the development of the historical novelty of this time. From the experience of faith we can announce the new historical era as Good News, that is, to proclaim that we have before us the **opportunity to contribute to improving the living conditions of all human beings**. This can come about if we manage to create **solidarity and fraternal relations grounded in social**

justice. This is possible if each person understands himself as part of a community, that is to say, experiences relationships with others as a dimension of himself. This experience impels one to make his own contribution to the common good regardless of age, ability, education, social status, ideology, culture, religion or the colour of one's skin. Even more, the new era of humanity, closely bound to the awareness of a new and inescapable dimension of social justice will dawn in order to establish a harmonious relationship with nature, with which we share and on which depends life on planet Earth. A harmonious relationship with nature is an indispensable condition to walk toward a life of quality, such as that which is the dream of hundreds of cultures and millions and millions of persons. Scientific and humanistic thinking have here a role at the forefront.

A Faculty of Theology, too, is one of the privileged places from where we can contribute to the creation of social relationships and relationships with nature that can humanize the historical epoch that will dawn. It is not possible to bring to life the novelty of human history without research and creative thinking. If theological reflection is to make a difference to humanity coming of age, it must be born in and nurtured by a deep faith life, a life of prayer. It must also be supported by serious study.

Fr. Adolfo Nicolás often shared a conversation he had with a wise Buddhist monk in Japan. "Western Christianity," said the monk, "came to the East emphasizing doctrine, insisting on the Truth." "In the East," he went on, "we are more concerned with the Way that helps us in our search for the Divine." The underlying thought here is that it is not enough to be acquainted with doctrine and theological truths. We need to learn how to accompany others in their search for God and that accompaniment is possible only when we do theology in an atmosphere of a deep and living faith. I recall hearing, as a scholastic, a senior priest say: "when I was a scholastic the two most important places in the community were the Chapel and the Library". I wonder which two places come to mind spontaneously as those that matter most in the Vidyajoti community today!

Thinking in universities, including theological centres, is characterized by the capacity to create knowledge and then to organize to spread it systematically through academic programs and through action in all areas of social life. A Faculty of Theology has a huge responsibility to create significant knowledge to help make this new era a historic moment of growth that is authentically human, precisely because this is the Good News that we accept in faith, proclaim with our lives and reflect on theologically. Our theological reflection must be imbued not only by a thorough grasp of the context, which we try to assimilate through acquaintance with the social situation, but it must seek to be responsive to the life context of those we address. On the one hand, and increasingly in major Indian cities, there is the phenomenon of secularism and religious indifference so widespread in the West. On the other hand, there is the vibrancy of popular religion that animates the lives of millions in India of every religious persuasion. Our theological reflection must assist us in developing a language to speak to this secular world and it must also guide us so that we present the joy of the Gospel in ways that deepen the joy in religion but guards against an over-emotionalism that

makes it devoid of depth and social concern. Finally, we cannot conceive of a theological enterprise which, in India, does not engage in a respectful dialogue with other religions, a dialogue that enables us to share and also to receive.

3. A worldwide network of Jesuit Faculties and Universities - The 36th General Congregation makes a strong invitation to Jesuits to collaborate and to network as the way of proceeding to be effective in our mission today. There are almost two hundred Faculties of Philosophy / Theology and Higher Education institutions all over the world under the responsibility of the Society of Jesus. There are fifty-four of these in India and they are making an important contribution to research and teaching. Can you imagine how the standard of these institutions would improve if they formed an effective network? Can you imagine how they would be able to enrich each other and make better use of their resources, which are always limited?

Taking seriously the General Congregation's invitation, I want to insist that you and all the other Higher Education institutions in South Asia form an effective network. This would be the best way to improve collaboration among Jesuit institutions in India and to prepare for their participation in the worldwide Jesuit network of Higher Education. In 2010, Fr. Adolfo Nicolás convoked the first meeting of Jesuit Higher Education Institutions in Mexico City. His message to them was loud and clear: we need to move towards forming an international network, and we want to organise our Faculties and Universities all over the world in a network. Regional networking has increased in the last 10 years. In the second meeting of Higher Education Institutions held in Melbourne (Australia) in 2015, it became clear that it was possible to establish a universal network of Jesuit Faculties and Higher Education Institutions in 2018 when a third such meeting of Jesuit Higher Education Institutions is planned. I am sure that South Asia will be an important member of the Jesuit Higher Education Global Network.

Networking among us also opens great possibilities of collaborating with others in the challenging adventure of planning and working for the future of humanity. Let us engage ourselves in this process as part of our mission. Allow me to conclude with a phrase that I found on a greeting card for Christmas sent to me by a German Bishop. It said: "do as God did: become human." Indeed! St. Ignatius used to say the purpose of the Society of Jesus is to help souls '. He meant to say exactly that: to help all to become human. Thank you very much for your attention and understanding. Fr. Arturo Sosa, SJ, Jesuit Superior General, http://www.sjweb.info/documents/assj/20170218_General_VJ_address.pdf